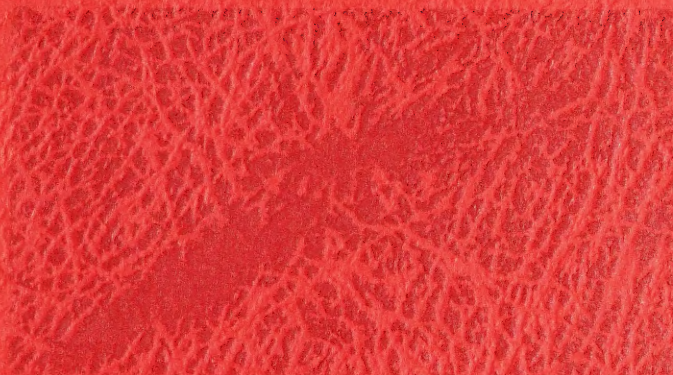


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Dating Violence

What Is Dating Violence?

Dating violence is the sexual, physical or emotional abuse of one partner by the other in a dating relationship where the couple is not living together. While incidents of violence against men do occur, violence against women is more pervasive, more systematic, and usually more severe.

Sexual abuse may involve sexual relations without consent, unwanted sexual touching, or being forced to engage in humiliating, degrading sexual activity. Coercion or the threat of coercion is often used to gain the compliance of the victim.

Physical abuse may involve punching, kicking, slapping, pushing, choking, biting, burning, hair pulling, physically confining, striking with an object, or assaulting with a weapon.

Emotional abuse may involve intimidating, terrorizing, threatening, humiliating, insulting, pressuring, destroying property, controlling the movements of one's partner, yelling and screaming to induce fear,

isolating from friends and family, or other expressions of extreme jealousy.

How Widespread Is the Problem?

It is difficult to determine the actual prevalence of dating violence, as it is rarely reported to the authorities. A few research studies have been conducted among high school and college students in Canada and the United States.

A study among 304 secondary students in Toronto revealed that one fifth of the young women surveyed reported having experienced at least one form of abuse in a dating relationship. Sixty percent of the students indicated that they had been exposed to dating violence, either directly as victims or perpetrators, or by having witnessed or heard of incidents.¹

A recent study at York University in Toronto suggests that the use of force in sexual relations is surprisingly acceptable to many young Canadians. Asked "If a girl engages in necking or petting and

she lets things get out of hand, is it her own fault if her partner forces sex on her?" 31% of the males and 22% of females agreed.²

A survey done for the National Institute of Mental Health in the United States estimated more than one million sexual assaults against teenagers every year. The survey noted that the actual incidence of assaults was probably much higher because many teenagers do not report the attacks.³

Facts to Consider

Date Rape

- Date rape has the lowest reporting rate of all forms of rape. It is estimated that only 1% of date rapes are reported to the authorities.⁴
- Victims of sexual assault are much more likely to report the crime to the police when it is perpetrated by a stranger than when it is committed by an acquaintance, friend, or partner.
- Date rape does not fit the stranger-in-the-dark-alley stereotype. As a result, many people fail to recognize it as sexual assault and mistakenly blame the victim for arousing the attacker.
- A recent report on date and acquaintance rape conducted among over 6100 students found that 84% of the women who had been sexually assaulted knew their attacker and that 57% of the rapes had happened on a date.⁵
- The same survey found that 75% of the men and 55% of the women involved in incidents of date rape had been drinking or taking drugs.⁶
- Many women who have been forcibly sexually assaulted while on a date do not identify the incident as rape.
- A survey conducted in Rhode Island among 1700 students in grades 6 to 9 revealed that 65% of the boys and 47% of the girls found it acceptable for a man to force a woman to have sex if they had been dating for more than six months.⁷
- Male victims are usually hesitant to report sexual assault as they fear that they will be ridiculed or perceived as homosexual.

Physical Abuse

- It is most often men who use violence and women who suffer it.
- Teenage victims of dating violence are often doubly isolated, first by being battered, and then by administrative barriers. Shelters for battered women cannot officially house women until they reach the age of majority (14 to 18, depending on the province or territory involved).⁸
- Dating violence is sometimes viewed by one or both partners as an indication of love, especially when it is perceived as a sign of jealousy. However, assault is about power, not passion.
- Women who are physically assaulted in dating relationships cite jealousy and attempts to end a romantic relationship as the most common reasons for the assaults.⁹
- The pressure to be seen to be dating can be a powerful motivation for young people. Many victims of dating violence may believe that having an abusive partner is better than not having a partner at all.

Emotional Abuse

- It is often difficult to recognize and identify emotional abuse because, unlike physical assault, there are seldom visible signs of the abuse.
- For many women, emotional abuse may be the most painful and damaging aspect of an abusive relationship. Even though they had sustained serious injuries as a result of physical abuse, most of the women surveyed in one study reported that verbal battering was the worst form of abuse they had experienced.¹⁰
- Emotional abuse may take the form of extreme social isolation. Offenders who isolate their partners from friends and family increase their feelings of powerlessness and helplessness.
- An abused woman does not have the power or the influence to stop her abuser's violence. Most abusive partners will not change their violent behaviour without receiving counselling that

enables them to take personal responsibility for ending their abusive behaviour.¹¹

What Can Be Done to Prevent Dating Violence?

As an individual you can help young people by teaching them that:

- rape is a crime of violence, and that it is motivated by a desire to control and dominate, rather than by sexual interest;
- taking sexual advantage of a woman who is mentally or physically incapable of giving consent (for example, when intoxicated) is rape;
- the use of corporal punishment in the home, as a form of discipline, legitimizes violence and gives young people the mistaken message that force is an indication of love;
- coercion and verbal abuse are unacceptable forms of interaction in any relationship;
- controlling and possessive behaviour between friends or partners is inappropriate;
- excessive jealousy in a relationship often leads to manipulative and abusive behaviour;
- no one deserves to be abused, no matter what the provocation, and by acknowledging that battery is always wrong;
- unwanted sexual activity is abusive, damaging to the victim, and criminal;
- every woman has the unqualified right to say no to unwanted sexual activity;
- no one has the right to force sexual activity on another person, regardless of the nature of their relationship or how long they have been friends;
- violence is a crime, whether the abuser is a spouse, friend, acquaintance or stranger.

As a community member you can help by:

- Acknowledging that early violent relationships do not occur in a vacuum, but instead reflect a broader social reality where women are most

often the victims and men the abusers in violent relationships.

- Encouraging your local school board to develop educational programs which promote healthier sex roles, offer information about sexual violence, and emphasize ways to resolve conflict without resorting to force.
- Encouraging the colleges and universities in your area to establish on-campus dating violence counselling and education services.
- Taking an active stand against local businesses that promote the normalization of violence against women (through pornography, offensive advertising, etc.).
- Helping to organize dating violence awareness and prevention programs in your community. As men and women become more aware of what dating violence is and how it occurs, they may be able to reduce its prevalence.

Suggested Reading

- *Date Rape: Annotated Bibliography*. Ottawa: National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, Health and Welfare Canada, 1989.
- *Dating Violence: A Discussion Guide on Violence in Young People's Relationships*, by Debra J. Lewis. Vancouver: Vancouver Battered Women's Support Services, 1987.
- *"Friends" Raping Friends: Could it Happen to You?* by Jean O'Gorman Hughes and Bernice R. Sandler. Washington, D.C.: Project on the Status of Education of Women, 1987.
- *I Never Called it Rape: The Ms. Report On Recognizing, Fighting and Surviving Date And Acquaintance Rape*. Ms. Magazine, Sarah Lazin Books, 1988.
- *Let's Talk About Sexual Assault*, by Trace Porteous, Rhona Loptson and Nora Janitus. Victoria, B.C.: Victoria Women's Sexual Assault Centre, 1988.
- *Not a Pretty Picture: An Exploratory Study of Violence against Women in High School Dating Relationships*, by Shirley Litch Mercer. Toronto: Education Wife Assault, 1987.

- *Patterns of Violence in the Lives of Girls and Women: A Reading Guide*. Vancouver: Women's Research Centre, 1989.

Audio-visual: The Family Violence Prevention Division of Health and Welfare Canada has compiled a collection of over 50 films and videos on family violence which can be borrowed free of charge through the regional offices of the National Film Board.

Endnotes

1. Shirley Litch Mercer, *Not A Pretty Picture: An Exploratory Study of Violence against Women in High School Dating Relationships* (Toronto: Education Wife Assault, 1987), pp. 7-8.
2. James V.P. Check and Victoria LaCrosse, *Attitudes and Behaviour Regarding Pornography, Sexual Coercion and Violence in Metropolitan Toronto High School Students* (Toronto: The LaMarsh Research Programme Reports On Violence and Conflict Resolution, 1988), p. 12.
3. Suzanne S. Ageton, *Facts About Sexual Assault: A Research Report for Teenagers* (Rockville U.S.: Department of Health and Human Services, 1985), p. 4.
4. Diana Russell, *Sexual Exploitation: Rape, Child Abuse and Workplace Harassment* (Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publishing, 1984), p. 96.
5. Robin Warshaw, *I Never Called It Rape: The Ms. Report On Recognizing, Fighting And Surviving Date And Acquaintance Rape*, Ms. Magazine/Sarah Lazin Books, 1988, p. 11.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
7. "Rape Okay if Man Pays for Date, Students Say", *Toronto Star*, May 3, 1988.
8. Linda MacLeod, *Battered But not Beaten ... Preventing Wife Battering in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1987), p. 27.
9. Angela Browne, *When Battered Women Kill* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), p. 51.
10. Lenore E. Walker, *The Battered Woman* (New York: Harper, 1979), p. 172.
11. Linda MacLeod, *Wife Battering and the Web of Hope, Progress, Dilemmas and Visions of Prevention*, Discussion Paper (Ottawa: Family Violence Prevention Division, Health and Welfare Canada, 1989), p. 47.

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